

This Week in Congress

January 25, 2010

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress."

Sharing Stories of Kansans Impacted by Haiti Earthquake

This week, I heard many touching stories about Kansans impacted by the recent tragedies in Haiti. Kansans have responded generously by making donations to relief organizations, including the [American Red Cross](#), the [Salvation Army](#), [World Vision](#) and others, as well as to local churches. All who have donated money and supplies, served on search and rescue teams, and prayed for those affected, deserve our gratitude. On Thursday, I delivered a speech on the House floor recognizing many of these individuals who have devoted their lives to the betterment of Haiti.

[Click here](#) [Click here](#)

to watch a video of this speech, or
[click here](#)
to read the text.

On Friday in Topeka, I visited with Brigadier General Ed Flora, Chief of Staff and Commander of the Kansas Air National Guard. The Kansas Air National Guard is sending supplies and personnel to aid the efforts in Haiti. About 50 airmen of the 190th Civil Engineering Squadron are deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and are awaiting orders to help rebuild infrastructure in Haiti. I appreciate their service during this time of crisis.

The State Department has established a hotline to check on loved ones that are in Haiti. If you have friends or relatives in Haiti, you may call 1-888-407-4747 or email Haiti-Earthquake@State.Gov. If emailing, the State Department asks that certain information be included about the people you are attempting to reach in Haiti.

[Click here](#)
to read more about contacting loved ones in Haiti. As for those of us in Congress, we are committed to doing everything in our power to ensure a swift and safe conclusion to this crisis. The people of Haiti and those affected by this tragedy are in my thoughts and prayers.

Massachusetts Special Election Results Impact Health Care Legislation

On Tuesday, Massachusetts voters elected Republican Scott Brown to fill the Senate seat formerly held by Senator Ted Kennedy. Brown's historic victory gives Republicans 41 seats in the Senate, eliminating the filibuster-proof Democratic majority and leaving Democrats scrambling for a way to get health care passed. Reports have ranged from the House voting up-or-down on the Senate bill, to using budget reconciliation measures as a fast-track parliamentary strategy. On Thursday, however, Speaker Pelosi stated that she does not have the votes to pass the Senate health care reform bill in the House.

The message from Massachusetts and across the country is that Americans overwhelmingly oppose the current health care reform proposals. Americans are fed up with the secrecy, backroom deals, and personal handouts with which these bills have been written. We need to start over on meaningful health care reform that will preserve access and reduce costs for Kansans.

Kansans Participate in the March for Life in Washington

This week, hundreds of thousands of Americans, including many Kansans, gathered in Washington, D.C., to participate in the March for Life. This annual event allows participants to stand up for the sanctity of all human life. I met with many of the Kansas participants, including Archbishop Joseph Naumann of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, as well as groups from Wichita, Kingman, Goddard, and McPherson. [Click here](#) to view photos of the groups' visits.

This year's March for Life is more significant than ever as Congress considers health care reform legislation that could allow taxpayer dollars to pay for abortions. H.R. 3962, the House health care reform bill, contains the "Stupak/Pitts Amendment," which would maintain the current policy of preventing federal funding for abortion and for health benefit packages that include abortion. However, H.R. 3962, the Senate health care reform bill, would require federal funds to cover elective abortions.

In December, I wrote Speaker Pelosi, urging that she preserve the Stupak/Pitts Amendment in any final version of health care reform legislation. I was joined by 39 of my House colleagues in signing the letter. Unfortunately, I never heard back from the Speaker on this important issue. On Friday, I sent another request to the Speaker, again insisting that she keep the Stupak/Pitts language in any final version of health care legislation. Directing taxpayer dollars to fund abortions is a clear violation of many Americans' deeply held beliefs and Americans should not be forced to compromise their core moral beliefs as a means to health care reform. [Click here](#) to view my speech on the House floor on this matter.

Protecting Seniors' Access to Vaccinations

On Friday, I urged House leaders to protect Kansas' access to vaccinations in health reform legislation. As convenient and accessible health care providers, pharmacies are uniquely positioned to offer immunization services for patients. Today, pharmacists have the ability to immunize patients in all 50 states, presenting an opportunity for patients to receive pharmacists' counseling during their visits, and helping our nation to meet the increasing demand for healthcare services such as immunizations and respond to events such as the H1N1 pandemic.

I am concerned because the House reform bill would eliminate the coverage of vaccines in the existing Medicare Part D program (Medicare Drug benefits), moving all coverage to Medicare Part B (physician services, outpatient care, and home health services among others). As seniors have become more aware of their ability to obtain vaccinations through Medicare Part D, the number of seniors receiving these vaccines at their neighborhood pharmacy has steadily grown. Eliminating Part D coverage for these vaccines would hamper access to this important preventative service and disrupt the progress made in increasing vaccination rates in the elderly.

Opposing the Marriage Penalty in Health Care Reform Legislation

This week, I contacted Speaker Pelosi to oppose the marriage penalty contained in the current health care reform bills. In both the House- and Senate-passed reform bills, health insurance subsidies would impose significant penalties on married couples. For example, a married couple with an annual combined income of \$50,000 would face a \$2,084 penalty in the House bill and more than a \$1,500 penalty in the Senate bill. There should be agreement on both sides of the aisle that the federal government should not penalize people simply for being married. A marriage penalty on middle class families has no place in a health care bill.

Visiting with Veterans Affairs Secretary Shinseki

On Wednesday, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki stopped by my office to visit about priorities for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in the coming year. I stressed the need to address the backlog of benefit claims that is causing an unacceptable delay for many veterans and their families waiting to receive VA benefits. Secretary Shinseki and I also visited about the implementation of the new GI Bill and a pilot program to allow Kansas veterans to obtain health care in their home communities and avoid traveling long distances to VA facilities, as well as the VA's progress in enrolling additional Priority Group 8 veterans. Priority 8 veterans –many of whom are currently unable to enroll in VA medical care – are those without service-connected disabilities and who do not meet certain income thresholds. As a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I will continue to work hard to make certain our nation's military men and women and veterans receive the strong benefits and health care services they have earned.

House Names the Jan Meyers Post Office in Overland Park

On Wednesday, the House passed a bill I cosponsored naming a post office in Overland Park in honor of former Kansas Congresswoman Jan Meyers. Congresswoman Meyers was the first Republican woman elected to the House of Representatives from Kansas, where she served from 1985 to 1997. She worked tirelessly to protect small businesses and eventually became the first woman to chair a committee in 20 years when she became Chairwoman of the Small Business Committee in 1995.

Congresswoman Meyers won her first Kansas Senate race with the slogan "Jan-Can." That slogan sums up Jan's career as a public servant, first as a member of the Overland Park City Council, where she helped lay the groundwork for major four-lane streets such as College Boulevard, and later in the House of Representatives. Jan Meyers is an inspiration to fellow members of Congress and to Kansans. [Click here](#) to view my comments about Congresswoman Meyers on the House floor.

Israel Needs U.S. Support

On Sunday, I joined Kansans who share a common interest in Israel at Kehilath Israel Synagogue in Overland Park to learn more about current issues affecting the Jewish state. Israel faces many challenges, including the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran and the rearming of terrorist group Hezbollah in Lebanon. While speaking to those in attendance, I pledged to continue to support Israel's right to self-defense; to build support for imposing tough sanctions on Iran so that it gives up its pursuit of nuclear weapons; to encourage peace between Israel and its neighbors; and to tell the positive stories about Israel, like the efforts of Israelis to help those affected by the earthquake in Haiti. Thank you to Robert and Miriam Glueck for inviting me to this event. Special Thanks to Michael Lerner for the kind introduction and hospitality.

Visiting Valley View Retirement Community in Junction City

On Friday, I visited the Valley View Retirement Community in Junction City. I enjoyed meeting Valley View's staff and residents. Kansas senior living centers are facing many challenges due to state cuts in Medicaid and Medicare cuts proposed in current health care reform legislation. I remain committed to preserving Kansans' access to senior living centers and other long term care facilities. I appreciate the invitation to see, firsthand, the good care being provided by Valley View Senior Life. Thanks to Executive Administrator Chris Rea for arranging my visit.

Visiting with Kansas College Presidents

On Friday, I met with Washburn University President Jerry Farley in Topeka. President Farley and I discussed the value of Washburn University to the state of Kansas, including the school's nursing education and technical education programs. Thanks to Cindy Hornberger for arranging my visit and for the opportunity to meet other educators at Washburn University.

I also met with Kansas Wesleyan University (KWU) President Dr. Fletcher Lamkin in Salina. Dr. Lamkin is new to KWU, having just arrived in Salina this week. Before coming to KWU, Dr. Lamkin spent several years as a professor, department head and program director at West Point, and later as President of Westminster College of Fulton, Missouri. Dr. Fletcher provided me an update on the university and also arranged a tour of the Hauptli Student Center on campus. Special thanks to Darin Russell for showing me the facility.

In the Office

Bob Parkerson of Overland Park was in with National Crop Insurance Services to discuss the renegotiation of the Standard Reinsurance Agreement between the crop insurance industry and

the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Fred Lucky of Topeka was in with the Kansas Hospital Association to discuss health care reform legislation and priorities for Kansas hospitals. Dr. Scott Hamilton of Topeka was in with the American Association of Orthodontists to discuss oral health and small business initiatives in health care reform.

Sheriff Frank Denning of Olathe, Sheriff Ken McGovern of Lawrence, and Undersheriffs Dave Burger and Kevin Cavanaugh of Lenexa were in to discuss a number of legislative issues, including amending the Hatch Act and Department of Justice grants beneficial to law enforcement in Kansas.

Anna Gregory of Topeka and Sheila Martinez of Olathe each stopped by to visit. Also, several Kansans came by my Washington, D.C., office to receive a tour of the United States Capitol, including Luke Rahjes of Kensington, Vernon and Karen Flanagan of Colby, and several groups participating in the March for Life.

Very truly yours,

Jerry